

Erik Gomez

January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Meeting on Covid-19 Vaccine Passport Mandate

Dear Council,

I write this letter two years after the start of an unprecedented pandemic that forever changed everyone's lives. We have weathered wave after wave and variant after variant. Undoubtedly, we are all exhausted and overwhelmed. My condolences go to those that have lost loved ones and those survivors that are now dealing with long-hauler symptoms.

Luckily, the world is in a different position than in previous waves. We have at least four vaccines that offer some protection against Covid and data from South Africa and elsewhere have indicated that the Omnicron variant is milder and less deadlier than the previous ones.

In addition to the severity of Omnicron, Montgomery County data suggests our county is almost at 85% of the population vaccinated against Covid. This is important because the Centers for Disease Control and Protection(CDC) have stated an 85% vaccinated rate as a reasonable threshold for herd immunity.

Our county has complied throughout the pandemic. Each and every Montgomery County resident should be praised for believing in science by getting vaccinated.

We were virtually the only county in Maryland with stricter Covid regulations, even outdoing the nation's capital, the District of Columbia. Our northern neighbor, Howard County, did not have mask mandates until recently, and they had a higher vaccinated rate than Montgomery County. Also, Frederick County did not have a mask mandate with a lower vaccination rate. So it is understandable that Montgomery County residents feel frustrated that despite good news concerning Omnicron, regulations in neighboring counties and cities, and our high vaccination rate, we are now being asked once more to go above and beyond and comply with a vaccine passport.

The rise in cases is not a result of people not being vaccinated; it results from a more virulent variant that infects even vaccinated individuals. Montgomery County is not the only one seeing a rise in cases (luckily, hospitalizations are not as high). Thus, based on South African data, it seems we are in the final phase of a pandemic and entering an endemic phase. We cannot introduce a vaccine passport when we did not do the same last year when Delta was much deadlier. We cannot introduce a vaccine passport now that we are reaching an 85% vaccination goal.

A vaccine passport mandate will not persuade those that are currently not vaccinated to get vaccinated. If anything, it will make residents angrier at the fact that the community is ostracizing them, coming from a fully vaccinated person. Furthermore, what is the point in a vaccine passport mandate when there have been few reports of large outbreaks from indoor dining, gyms, indoor entertainment establishments, etc. Most people are infected in private gatherings.

Thus, I end this letter by imploring you not to pass another rule that you will perhaps need to tweak (as the fiasco with the moderate to substantial transmission mask lifting this fall showed us).